
AP[®] English Literature and Composition

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

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Question 2: Prose Fiction Analysis

6 points

The following excerpt is from Tim Winton’s novel *Breath*, published in 2008. In this passage, the main character, Bruce Pike, recalls an incident at a nearby river. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Winton uses literary elements and techniques to represent the complex response of the narrator to the incident at the riverbank.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row A Thesis (0-1 points)	0 points For any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no defensible thesis. The intended thesis only restates the prompt. The intended thesis provides a summary of the issue with no apparent or coherent claim. There is a thesis, but it does not respond to the prompt. 	1 point Responds to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation of the passage.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only restate the prompt. Make a generalized comment about the passage that doesn't respond to the prompt. Describe the passage or features of the passage rather than making a claim that requires a defense. 	Responses that earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a defensible interpretation of the narrator's complex response to the incident at the riverbank.
	Examples that do not earn this point: Restate the prompt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "In this excerpt from <i>Breath</i>, Winton employs various literary techniques and elements to portray the narrator's response to the incident at the riverbank." Do not respond to the prompt but make a generalized comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Many year-round residents of a place feel disdainful towards the tourists that visit their hometown only during a particular season." Describe the passage or features of the passage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The narrator describes his memory of the prank at the river with his schoolmate Ivan Loon." 	Examples that earn this point: Provide a defensible interpretation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "In this excerpt, the narrator sees the fun in Loon's pulling the prank on the summer visitors and also feels conflicted about the lady's response." "The author's use of the first-person point of view combined with the backward-looking perspective of a story that is being told some time later allows the narrator to reflect on the 'sympathy and contempt' he felt for the woman and girls during this incident." "Winston uses first-person narration, vivid descriptions, and humor to convey the narrator's greater sense of connection to his friend Loon and his embarrassment on behalf of the woman who feels powerless in the situation."
Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The thesis may be more than one sentence, provided the sentences are in close proximity. The thesis may be anywhere within the response. For a thesis to be defensible, the passage must include at least minimal evidence that <i>could</i> be used to support that thesis; however, the student need not cite that evidence to earn the thesis point. The thesis <i>may</i> establish a line of reasoning that structures the essay, but it needn't do so to earn the thesis point. A thesis that meets the criteria can be awarded the point whether or not the rest of the response successfully supports that line of reasoning. 		

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria				
Row B Evidence AND Commentary (0-4 points)	0 points Simply restates thesis (if present), repeats provided information, or offers information irrelevant to the prompt.	1 point EVIDENCE: Provides evidence that is mostly general. AND COMMENTARY: Summarizes the evidence but does not explain how the evidence supports the student's argument.	2 points EVIDENCE: Provides some specific, relevant evidence. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence relates to the student's argument, but no line of reasoning is established, or the line of reasoning is faulty.	3 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Explains how some of the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how at least one literary element or technique in the passage contributes to its meaning.	4 points EVIDENCE: Provides specific evidence to support all claims in a line of reasoning. AND COMMENTARY: Consistently explains how the evidence supports a line of reasoning. AND Explains how multiple literary elements or techniques in the passage contribute to its meaning.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes				
	Typical responses that earn 0 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are incoherent or do not address the prompt. May be just opinion with no textual references or references that are irrelevant. 	Typical responses that earn 1 point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tend to focus on overarching narrative developments or description of a passage rather than specific details or techniques. Mention literary elements, devices, or techniques with little or no explanation. 	Typical responses that earn 2 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consist of a mix of specific evidence and broad generalities. May contain some simplistic, inaccurate, or repetitive explanations that don't strengthen the argument. May make one point well but either do not make multiple supporting claims or do not adequately support more than one claim. Do not explain the connections or progression between the student's claims, so a line of reasoning is not clearly established. 	Typical responses that earn 3 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an interpretation. Organize an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims. Commentary may fail to integrate some evidence or fail to support a key claim. 	Typical responses that earn 4 points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniformly offer evidence to support claims. Focus on the importance of specific words and details from the passage to build an interpretation. Organize and support an argument as a line of reasoning composed of multiple supporting claims, each with adequate evidence that is clearly explained. Explain how the writer's use of multiple literary techniques contributes to the student's interpretation of the passage.
	Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing that suffers from grammatical and/or mechanical errors that interfere with communication cannot earn the fourth point in this row. To earn the fourth point in this row, the response may observe multiple instances of the same literary element or technique if each instance further contributes to the meaning of the passage. 				

Reporting Category	Scoring Criteria	
Row C Sophistication (0-1 points)	0 points Does not meet the criteria for one point.	1 point Demonstrates sophistication of thought and/or develops a complex literary argument.
	Decision Rules and Scoring Notes	
	Responses that do not earn this point: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempt to contextualize their interpretation, but such attempts consist predominantly of sweeping generalizations (“<i>Human experiences always include...</i>” OR “<i>In a world where...</i>” OR “<i>Since the beginning of time...</i>”). Only hint at or suggest other possible interpretations (“<i>While another reader may see...</i>” OR “<i>Though the passage could be said to...</i>”). Make a single statement about how an interpretation of the passage comments on something thematic without consistently maintaining that thematic interpretation. Oversimplify complexities in the passage. Use complicated or complex sentences or language that is ineffective because it does not enhance the student’s argument. 	Responses that earn this point may demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument by doing any of the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying and exploring complexities or tensions within the passage. Illuminating the student’s interpretation by situating it within a broader context. Accounting for alternative interpretations of the passage. Employing a style that is consistently vivid and persuasive.
	Additional Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This point should be awarded only if the sophistication of thought or complex understanding is part of the student’s argument, not merely a phrase or reference. 	

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

Children don't get to make many decisions for themselves. Much of growing up is learning how to handle things independently: how to be in charge. The intoxicating feeling of authority can be extremely exciting for a child. Such is the case in Tim Winton's 2008 novel, Breath. In Breath, the author uses a careful selection of detail and diction to convey the constant transfer of authority throughout the story, which initially fills the narrator with excitement but leads to his eager anticipation of taking it.

There are three main characters in this passage: the narrator, Ivan Leon and the woman. The author begins by selecting specific details about these characters that contextualize their actions for the rest of the excerpt. The first way he does so is by commenting on their origins. Leon and the narrator go to school together, as has been the case for "half our lives". They are described as "townie kids", meaning that they know their way around. They are home at the riverbank. The woman and her children, on the other hand, "were from out of town". Already, this puts the authority in the hands of the townies. Even in the face of an adult, they are in charge at the riverbank. ^{The woman} ~~They~~ are a little alien, being described as "out of place", making forgetful noises about the water which is, to the narrator, totally harmless. Because of her lack of expertise, the woman implores the narrator to search for a drowning boy. This is the first significant transfer of authority: from adult to child. The narrator is now in charge.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

His attitude towards his newfound authority is demonstrated in carefully selected diction that reveals his mind's inner workings. He feels himself "rise to the moment", feeling "bolder", as if bolstered by the responsibility. He seems excited to have such a crucially important job, considering carefully how to save the drowning child. Before he can begin his rescue, however, Ivan Leon reveals himself to be the drowning child, with a "fetal shriek", as if he is some sort of animal. His noisy proclamation wrecks authority away from the narrator, and Ivan clings to the authority for a while, generally making a fool of the flustered woman. Watching the scene from a distance, the narrator's excitement has left him. While the descriptions of the woman had been that of a strange, alien figure, they become more sympathetic as Leon flexes his authority over her in the water. As he dodges her attacks with expertise the narrator sees her as a "poor" woman, actually feeling "guilt" rather than excitement. Indeed, as time goes on and her lack of authority becomes complete, the narrator feels embarrassment for her, as if an adult without the same authority as a child is pathetic. Yet, the narrator's own desire for authority resurfaces when he retrieves her shoes from down stream, then goes so far as to explain Leon's trouble, explaining with mild condescension that he was holding on to the rocks underwater. The woman leaves with no comment and ~~the narrator~~ regains "some kind of authority" before driving away.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

In Breath, Tim Winton uses carefully selected details and diction to convey the transfer of power from one character to the next, which fills the narrator at first with excitement but eventually debilitates his spirit. This transfer of authority reveals how people like to be in charge and, no matter the circumstances, will always attempt to retain or take back control.

In the excerpt from Tom Winton's Novel *Breath*, the main character Bruce Pike recalls him witnessing a prank pulled, one he thought was real. The main character, ready to take action and help someone he thought was drowning, figures out it was just a prank when ~~the boy~~ ~~revealed~~ the boy revealed himself from the water. The author Tim Winton uses specific details and word choices to show the main character's heroic intent ~~and to make the story~~ to save the person drowning, as well as to show his sympathetic attitude toward those involved, showing the complexity of his response.

Whenever Bruce first discovered that it was his friend Ivan, born who was drowning, he rushes into action to help save him. The ~~author~~ Speaker states, "I was it", and "I went into action on their behalf," demonstrating the heroic intent that Bruce had in the situation. All of this despite the Speaker also claiming to not have, "the remotest thing in common", with Ivan. This shows the complexity of Bruce's thought process and response to the situation, as even though there were others with Ivan, and that Ivan was older than him, he felt it as his responsibility to save Ivan. ~~Bruce also helped~~

~~There are several things I did not tell you about
the trip. I did not tell you about the
the car, the car, the car, the car.~~

The author also uses these descriptive ~~words~~ words and phrases to show the ~~slow~~ change in his mood to be sympathetic toward those involved. Bruce is stated

Question 1 Question 2 Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

as, "feeling more guilt than glee", and, "I felt sympathy and content all at once." These words show that because of the situation, and seeing the girls upset at Ivan for putting them through that, he turns from wanting to be a hero, to being sympathetic and upset himself at the situation. A simple prank resulted in an outcome not expected, shown by the girls' anger as the speaker describing ~~the girls~~, "I had never ~~in~~ in my life seen a woman so angry." ~~These~~ These details show not only the complex implications of the actions, but also the complex response by the main character turning sympathetic, as usually this would be something the young boy Bruce himself might partake ~~in~~ in, describing himself as, "perfected the art of causing riverside panic." The situation made him realize that pulling the prank is not fun for everyone, specifically the one it is pulled on.

To conclude, specific details in how the author chose to write demonstrates a complex response from Bruce. Word choices and ~~the~~ the diction used showed a character turning ~~from~~ from fellow prankster, and want to be hero, into a sympathetic person, demonstrating the complexity the relatively simple situation truly had.

Question 1

Question 2

Question 3



Begin your response to each question at the top of a new page. Do not skip lines.

The narrator in "Breath" responds to the situation at the riverbank.

The literary techniques in "Breath" help convey the complexity of the narrator's response at the riverbank which is serious at first, but becomes mischievous when the situation is no longer serious. In the third paragraph, the diction conveys a very rushed tone, showing how the narrator was rushed to respond and not think the situation may be faked. ~~the narrator is quick~~

As the narrator watches the woman chase Loon, the third person perspective he has on the situation allows him to see the woman fail hopelessly as she chases the boy. Seeing this causes the narrator to feel guilty, even though he would normally feel very happy pulling these pranks. This shift in perspective on the pranks pulled on the riverbank is what makes this situation so complex, allowing the narrator to see how he may have treated other people.

Question 2

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

Responses to this question were, once again, expected to demonstrate how a student could carefully read a prose passage and then use an understanding of the literary elements and techniques associated with prose fiction to explain how the author represents the complex response of the narrator to the prank.

In this question, then, students had to think about the author’s construction of the passage and how it might be designed to produce a particular effect or convey a particular representation of the narrator’s response. This requires students to think both about the narrative of the text and about its construction and manipulation. It might also require them to think about how an author can affect a reader’s perceptions—not just a narrator’s response.

Sample: 2A

Score: 1-4-1

A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response earned the point in Row A with its defensible interpretation of the complex response of the narrator to the incident at the riverbank. The thesis, “In Breath, the author uses a careful selection of detail and diction to convey the constant transfer of authority throughout the story, which initially fills the narrator with excitement but leads to his eager anticipation deflating,” is located in the introductory paragraph.

B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 4

The line of reasoning—the “intoxicating feeling of authority”—is introduced in the first paragraph of the essay and is thoroughly developed and supported by specific evidence and perceptive commentary. The essay focuses on the three main characters from the passage: the narrator, Ivan Loon, and the woman who is the victim of Loonie’s trick. The student incorporates specific examples of literary techniques, such as “specific details” and diction, but does so through the lens of each character’s level of authority. For example, in paragraph 2, the response points out the significance of the details of the characters’ “origins.” The response points out Winton’s distinction of the characters: Loon and the narrator are described as “‘townie kids’” and the woman and her children “‘were from out of town.’” In the commentary that follows, the student argues “this puts the authority in the hands of the townies.” After further examination of the description of the woman, the student suggests, “Because of her lack of expertise, the woman implores the narrator to search for a drowning boy. This is the first significant transfer of authority.” The student notes that Ivan Loon’s moment of authority is punctuated by his “‘feral shriek,’” which “wrestles authority away from the narrator.” Later in the same paragraph, the essay notes the change in the narrator’s attitude toward the woman: “While the descriptions of the woman had been that of a strange, alien figure, they become more sympathetic as Loon flexes his authority over her in the water” and argues “the narrator feels embarrassment for her, as if an adult without the same authority as a child is pathetic.” The essay is organized in such a way as to fully support the line of reasoning with specific evidence that is insightfully explained. This essay earned 4 points in Row B.

C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 1

The essay earned the sophistication point through its in-depth discussion of the tensions and nuances of the shifting authority in the passage. Additionally, the essay is written in a vivid and persuasive style. Sentences such as “Yet, the narrator’s own desire for authority resurfaces when he retrieves her shoes from down stream, then goes so far as to explain Loon’s trick, explaining with mild condescension that he was holding on to the roots underwater” elevate the persuasive nature of the essay.

Question 2 (continued)

Sample: 2B

Score: 1-3-0

A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The response earned the point in Row A with its defensible thesis presented in the introduction to the essay: “The author Tim Winton uses specific details and word choices to show the main characters heroic intent to save the person drowning, as well as to show his sympathetic attitude toward those involved, showing the complexity of his response.”

B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 3

This essay focuses on the change in the narrator’s state of mind during the incident with Ivan Loon and the woman who believes he is drowning. The response is organized around two main ideas—the narrator’s sense of “responsibility to save Ivan” and Winton’s use of “descriptive words and phrases to show the change in his mood to be sympathetic toward those involved.” This line of reasoning is developed through the narrator’s own thoughts: “I was it” and “I felt sympathy and content all at once.” The student argues that the narrator “turns from wanting to be a hero, to being sympathetic and upset himself at the situation” and suggests the narrator’s thoughts demonstrate “the complex implications of the actions.” The response, however, does not fully sustain and consistently support some of the evidence, such as when the student incorrectly asserts that Bruce knows who the drowning boy is, and “he rushes into action to help save him.” An awkward connection between the narrator’s desire to help (“I went into action on their behalf”) and the narrator’s earlier comment that he and Ivan had not “the remotest thing in common” detracts from the line of reasoning. Still, because the essay establishes a line of reasoning, supports it with evidence, and explains how some of the evidence connects to it, the response earned 3 points in Row B.

C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The essay oversimplifies the complexities of the passage (“A simple prank resulted in an outcome not expected”) and, therefore, did not earn the point in Row C.

Sample: 2C

Score: 1-1-0

A. Thesis (0–1 points): 1

The essay earned the point in Row A through its introductory sentence: “The literary techniques in ‘Breath’ help convey the complexity of the narrators response at the riverbank which is serious at first, but becomes mischievous when the situation is no longer serious.” This thesis offers a defensible interpretation of the passage.

B. Evidence and Commentary (0–4 points): 1

The essay does not follow through on the argument made in the thesis. While some literary devices are mentioned in the essay, such as “In the Third paragraph, the diction conveys a very rushed tone,” no specific examples are presented, and the commentary “showing how the narrator was rushed to respond and not think the situation may be faked” is superficial. The essay describes the woman chasing Loon and suggests “[s]eeing this causes the narrator to feel guilty”; however, the evidence and commentary are too generalized to support a line of reasoning. While the student states, “This shift in perspective on the pranks pulled on the riverbank is what makes this situation so complex,” the complexity is not explored or explained. This response earned a score of 1 in Row B.

Question 2 (continued)

C. Sophistication (0–1 points): 0

The essay does not demonstrate sophistication of thought or develop a complex literary argument. It did not earn the point in Row C.